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ABSTRACT

This ERIC Digest is an overview of the process of recruiting and selecting principals. Criteria for selecting a principal should include problem analysis, organizational ability, decisiveness, effective communication skills, and stress tolerance, along with personal qualities such as dedication, creativity, and enthusiasm. Innovative steps that school districts are taking include indistrict training programs, career ladders, and internships, as well as outside recruitment. The selection process will be fair and comprehensive if a trained, diverse selection team considers information gathered from many sources and develops an interview process including simulations, written exercises, and situational questions, along with follow-up orientation and evaluation procedures. The last section addresses the importance of affirmative action in ensuring greater representation of women and minorities in school administration. (TE)

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It is predicted that half of all current U.S. principals will retire within the next four or five years. Aware of the difference effective leadership can make, many school districts are reviewing unsystematic hiring practices that have emphasized image over skill, and are beginning to embrace a more comprehensive and well-thought-out principal recruitment and selection process.

What criteria should school districts consider when selecting a principal?

A list of competencies for principals recommended by a National Association of Secondary School Principals' task force includes problem analysis, organizational ability, decisiveness, effective communication skills, and stress tolerance.

In addition to traditional requirements such as these, personal qualities must also be given consideration to counter what Richard Ihle (1987) calls a disturbing trend "toward greater weight being given to academic credentials." The NASSP has developed a statement of ethics for principals that recognizes their important professional leadership role in the school and community.

Principals must articulate a vision and values that they can use to transform or revitalize a school's atmosphere, according to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement's *Principal Selection Guide* (1987). They should be determined, creative, and enthusiastic—willing and able to confront problems and seek out opportunities to inspire their school communities toward beneficial change. This growth needs to occur, Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (1987) state, through empowerment rather than coercion, by "delegating, stretching the ability of others and encouraging educated risk." The principal must be the catalyst and champion of school improvement.

How can recruitment practices facilitate identification of promising candidates?

Early identification and encouragement of potential candidates, especially teachers who show promise of administrative ability, Ihle (1987) says, would reduce the tendency for self-selection or the hiring of "good paper." To ensure greater consistency of recruitment goals and practices, a written policy should be developed by a trained search committee.

"Applications, transcripts, references, interviews, and assessment data," Mark Anderson (1988) claims, can help determine an applicant's level and range of competency. Broadening the search committee to include parents, teachers, students, and community members, and circulating surveys for input on desirable principal traits, would give everyone a sense of participation in the selection of a new principal.

What innovative steps are school districts taking to recruit prospective principals?

To expand their pools of qualified applicants, school districts are resorting to indistrict training programs, career ladders, and internships, as well as outside recruitment. For example, in 1987 Oregon's David Douglas School District began its STAR (Selecting and Training Administrative Recruits) program, which identifies and trains "prospective principals from within the district's teacher corps," according to Anderson. Instructional units, taught by experienced district administrators, precede a week-long practicum designed by each participant. Interested candidates then complete internships that are interspersed with workshops in educational leadership.

Another district described by Anderson provides a full-time internship as an assistant to the superintendent in order to expose prospective principals to real-life administrative situations. Extended internships (six months to one year) provide valuable experience for candidates and additional information for selectors. Long-term internships also enable both parties in the selection process to make a more informed decision.

How can the selection be fair and comprehensive?

In the selection process, a trained, diverse team should consider information gathered from many sources, says Anderson (1988), and ask every candidate "the same, predetermined, and well-thought-out questions." Anderson adds that "effective interviews include simulations, written exercises, and situational questions."

One school district asks applicants to compose half-page essays answering challenging, pertinent questions, including "What processes will you employ in moving a school organization toward your envisioned change?" and "What are some key descriptors of leadership and management?"

At assessment centers sponsored by NASSP, participants engage in activities designed to simulate typical school situations. Exercises may include leaderless groups, fact-finding, stress tests, and personal interviews. Assessment center results not only guide potential employers, but also help prospective principals select internships and graduate courses based on a greater awareness of their personal strengths and weaknesses.

Later, followup orientation and evaluation procedures can assist new principals in becoming increasingly proficient at their jobs.

What would ensure greater representation of women and minorities in school administration?

David Coursen and others (forthcoming) assert that "the extent to which women and minorities participate in administering the schools is one measure of education's real commitment to the ideal of equal opportunity." Children identify with role models of their same sex and race who hold leadership positions. Moreover, negative stereotypes begin to break down when a variety of persons assume influential roles. Thus it is crucial to ensure the participation of underrepresented populations in high-level positions.

A 1987-88 survey by C. Emily Feistritzer reveals that as few as 6 percent of principals are black, that 24 percent are women, and that these individuals typically lead marginal or troublesome schools. The National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration recommends identifying promising minority and women candidates; providing scholarships, fellowships, and financial aid; and monitoring affirmative action compliance more closely. Establishment of affirmative action as a high priority could lead to greater numbers of women and minorities filling the role of principal.

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